Lafayette Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, California 94549

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Editors: Shirley Thompson (284-2995), Sue Cross (284-9594)

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October 1993

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

How did you spend your summer? Hope you had fun!

I did a lot of history reading in preparation for a talk on land ownership in Central Costa County as practiced by Indians, Spanish, Mexicans and Yankee settlers. My two primary sources were Slocam & Company's *History of Contra Costa County* and Dorothy Mutnick's *Some California Poppies and Even a Few Mommies*. I picked up a few tidbits concerning Lafayette that piqued my interest, and I hope you will enjoy them too.

First: *How was the name "Acalanes" derived?*
When Candelario Valencia verbally applied to the Mexican governor for his land grant, he selected the name "Los Sacalanes" for his rancho to honor the Saklan Indian tribe that lived in the area of his grant. Governor Vallejo missed the first "s" in Sacalanes and the grant was thus recorded as Rancho Acalanes. Valencia couldn't read and was unaware of the mistake, so the name has been carried down through the years as Acalanes.

Second: *When was this community named Lafayette?*
The Lafayette post office was put into operation on March 2, 1857, with Benjamin Shreve as postmaster. This was the second time he had applied for a post office grant in this area. His first application had been denied because he'd selected Centerville as the name and there was a Centerville post office in California at the time. (There is no Centerville post office in California now.) So, La Fayette was Shreve's second choice; the spelling was changed to its present form in the 1920's.

That brings up another interesting question: What was the community called before 1857? When I began looking for answers, I heard such names as Dog Town, Brown's Corner, Brown's Mill and Centerville. Does anyone know the answer? Where did residents do their mailing?

Third: *Did you know about the Acalanus post office?*
The Acalanus post office was operated from May 30,1854, until July 3, 1855, with Milo J. Hough as postmaster. Mr. Hough operated a hotel in Lafayette at that time, so we have assumed that the post office was located in the hotel. But that brings up yet another question: Where was the hotel located? Many of us in the Society think it was located on the southwest corner of Moraga Road and Mt. Diablo Boulevard. However, Dorothy Mutnick thought Hough's hotel was near the corner of First Street and Golden Gate Way.

When Mrs. Mutnick received information from the National Archives and Records Service in Washington D.C., regarding our post offices, she learned that there had been an Elk Horn post office in Contra Costa County; it was established May 7,1852, and discontinued December 17,1853, with John Mayo as postmaster. I have no information on it, and think the name hints at another area of the county, but the dates for it are interesting. Can anyone help?

I'd enjoy hearing from you.

Bill

William Wakeman

Lafayette's 1993 Citizen of the Year: Bill Wakeman

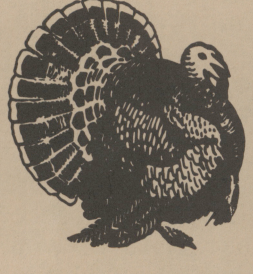
CONGRATULATIONS!

1993-94 Officers and Committee Chairs

President	Bill Wakeman
Vice President	Marechal Duncan
Treasurer	Sheila Piriano
Recording Secretary	Ruth Dyer
Corresponding Secretary	Oliver Hamlin
Annual Potluck Dinner	Richard Johnson, Oliver Hamlin
Archives	Irma Somerton
Book Sales	Ruth Dyer
Fire Engine	George Wasson
Historical displays	Bill and Irma Somerton
Landmarks	??
Membership	Oliver Hamlin
Oral History	Ray Peters, Marechal Duncan,George Wasson, Nancy Flood
Newsletter Editors	Shirley Thomson, Sue Cross
Newsletter Mailing	Frances Hunt, Ruby Sturman
Program	??
Publicity	Diddo Clark
Walking Tours	Collette Means

DUES

Student membership	$2.50
Family membership	10.00
Business membership	50.00
Life membership	100.00



Historical Society Board Meeting

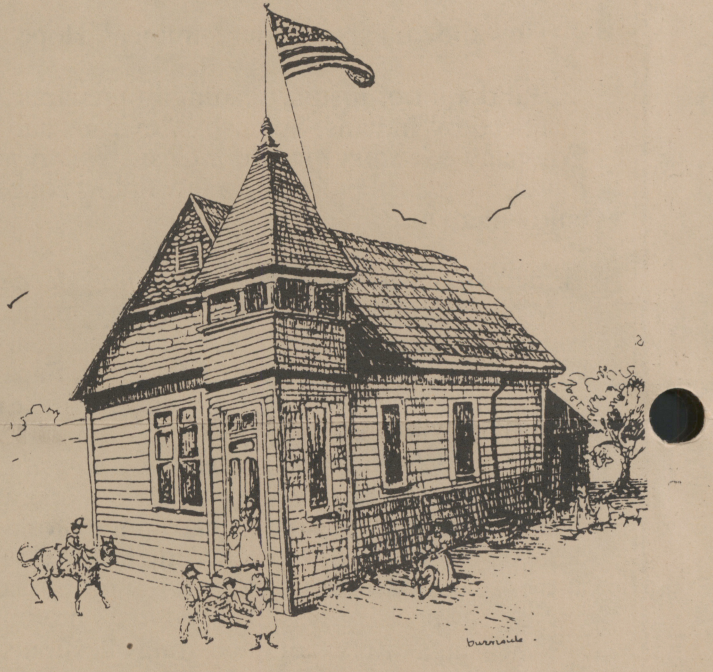
The next meeting of the LHS Board members and committee chairs is scheduled for Tuesday, November 9, at the Town Hall Theater, 3535 School St. at 7:30 PM.

All Members are welcome.

Something Old- Something New

On the occasion of the hundredth year of Lafayette's third schoolhouse, Lafayette artist Jeri Burnside created an original line ink drawing of the old school building and gave it to the Society. It has been reproduced and is available on informal notes in a quality card stock in packages of eight (at $5). Lafayette history boosters will surely find them irresistible. They'll make fine gifts for friends, too. Contact Ruth Dyer at 283-8312.

Thank you, Jeri Burnside.



With Long Over-due Thanks!

Everyone at the annual potluck dinner last May 11th appreciated the effective and thorough efforts of the team who made the evening work so well. Our hats are off to **Richard Johnson** and **Oliver Hamlin,** chief organizers again this year.

Help in the kitchen and the dining room was provided by a great team that included Chris Shreiber, Ruby and James Sturman, Marechal, Cameron and Lisa Duncan, Diddo Clark and Bonnie Wakeman. Virginia Anderson and Pat Whitten decorated with bright fresh flowers. Virginia Hamlin filled in for the absent Treasu as welcomer and dues-collector. And George Wasson cranked up our old fire engine—"Old Betsy"—and drove it to the site of the meeting. **Thanks to all!**

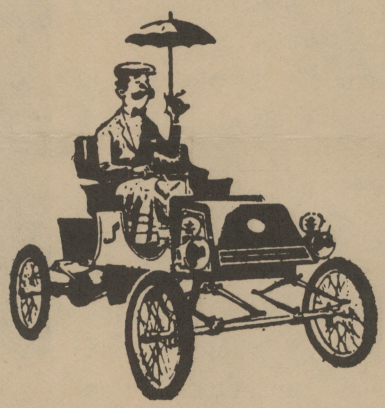
Note: The feature story reprinted below was written by Lafayette's Ann Goll for the Happy Valley Improvement Association's newsletter. We thank her for allowing us to run this good story about a memorable lady and a strong community-building family. -Ed.

VALLEY HISTORY - RITA BORGES SANTOS 1900-1992

by Ann Yeager Goll

The death of Rita Borges Santos, one of Happy Valley's longest living residents, marks the end of an era. Rita, who born in Berkeley in 1900, died at the age of 92 in November of this year. Although Mrs. Santos died of cancer, her mind was excellent till her last days. She enjoyed visiting with her huge circle of friends of Portuguese heritage as well as neighbors, and we enjoyed visiting with her.

Rita's father came to this country from the Azores and her mother was from the Maderia Islands. The Borges family moved to Happy Valley in 1903 on the advice of Mr. Borges's doctor; Rita's father had typhoid fever and was told to get away from the Bay Area climate.



Farming was the way of life in the early 1900s. The Borges's took their produce and meats to markets in Berkeley and Oakland. "It was a long trip by wagon. The old tunnel was used. My father when he was going through the tunnel with the horse and buggy, would take the hard of the whip and guide himself on the left side through the tunnel. When he couldn't touch the wall, he knew he was too far over so he would pull the other way a little bit. If he was too close, he was afraid the hub of the wheels would catch on the timbers of the sides of the tunnel and he would pull out a little bit. The horse would kind of find the way, but, of course, they couldn't be expected to think about the hub of the wheels."

At times he would put a lantern under the wagon so that if anybody was coming, they could see him. Once in a while, the horses would stop and my father would say, "Oh, someone is coming." Then he would whistle and the other people would whistle. Then they would get out of their buggies and see how much room they had to pass one another. It was very close. The tunnel was the scene of several robberies. "A neighbor, Mr. Johnson, was killed in the tunnel by some robbers."

At the age of six, Rita Borges met Charles Malley in Oakland at their first communion. The families became life-long friends. When the Malley's moved full-time to 1216 Upper Happy Valley in 1932, they got their milk from the Santos's cow every evening, according to Marianne Malley Millette. Marianne Millette and her sister, Patricia, recall visiting as children—not to play house—but office.

Rita Borges rode her horse to Lafayette Grammar School. In those days Happy Valley Road crossed several ranches. All had gates to be opened and closed. Lafayette Grammar School was located at the site of the Methodist Church. Her horse spent the day in a stall at the barn next to the school. All grades were taught in one room by one teacher. There were 32 children at the time. The first grade was at the front with each succeeding grade progressing to the 8th at the back by the window. One grade was taught at a time.

Rita's husband, Manuel Santos, who passed away several years ago, came here from Brazil. They met at her cousin's home in Oakland. She was 16 and he was 20 years old. They were married five years later. In 1918, Manuel purchased 12 acres in Happy Valley next to the Borges's ranch. The address was 4052 Happy Valley Road. Later the ranches were combined to total 40 acres.

Rita and Manuel never had children. They are survived by several nieces and nephews of Manuel's brother and sister living in the area. There is also a huge circle of admiring friends and neighbors who will always recall the Santoses' hardworking ways and generosity. Rita's intelligence helped them retire "well off." She and Manuel started with farming the land, but ended up owning at least one shopping center. In later years, Manuel Santos was quick to offer a glass of home-made wine to the afternoon visitor, according to Marion Schofield King and my father, T. H. Yeager. Rita and Manuel Santos were the kind of people you were lucky to have known.

Electric Power in Lafayette (or, History Sleuthing in an Old Album)
by William Wakeman

While looking through my mother's photo album I discovered the two pictures reproduced here. It was interesting to me that these baby pictures give clues to the time when electric power was installed on what now Lafayette Circle in central Lafayette.

The picture of me in the high chair was taken in the summer of 1921 when I was six months old. We lived at a location now identified as 241 Lafayette Circle. If you look past the baby to the house and trees in the background, you see a eucalyptus grove. These are the trees that stand near the present Chamber of Commerce office at 100 Lafayette Circle. Notice that there were no power poles or lines in front of the shingled house near the trees.*

Putting a date on the second picture of me sitting on the hood of the Chevrolet touring car had me baffled until I read the license plate; it says 1923. In those years car owners had to go to the closest DMV office every January, pay for car registration, and get new metal license plates with new numbers. Noting the leafless tree in the left of the picture, I think the picture may have been made in the first months of 1923 or early in the winter of 1923-24.

In any case, there is a reasonable evidence in the photos that electric power was installed in Lafayette during that period—after the summer of 1921 and before the end of 1923.

What were the ramifications?

In 1918 my parents had moved into the house my dad built. At that time it had a well and a hand pump just outside the back door. When electricity came, however, the Wakeman family found they could have running water in the house too. My father built a tank tower with a wooden tank to hold the water, and he installed a pump and plumbing for the kitchen. I still remember taking baths in a sheet metal tub set up on chairs in the kitchen. Mother heated the water on her kerosene cookstove. My father built an addition to the house then that included the bathroom, an entry hall, and two bedrooms, finishing them in that order.

In the mid-1920's PG&E made my parents an offer they couldn't refuse. If they bought an electric stove and a hot water heater from PG&E, the company would wire the house for these new appliances—free. Until then only the toilet (no sink or tub) was hooked up to the water system. Immediately after the installation of the hot water heater, the stove, and the wiring, the tub was put in and we could luxuriate in nice warm baths without having to heat up small quantities of water on the kitchen stove.

*There's a story to tell about the man who lived in that shingled house across the street from us. He was Joe Elliott, a long-time resident of Lafayette. Joe considered voting to be a citizen's patriotic duty. One election day when the election board questioned his naturalization record, however, it was soon clear he was jumping the gun a bit—born in Canada, he hadn't naturalized yet. So Joe got his papers in order and went on with his patriotic duty.

Important This n' That's...

- Our very best wishes to Diddo and Paul...Mr. & Mrs. Paul Reiche as of October 10.
- Be watching for information about a possible house tour...a tour of "historic" Lafayette homes...to be held in the spring.
- How many of you know the Birthday of the Wayside Inn? Be ready for a big one!

Lafayette Historical Society
POST OFFICE BOX 133 LAFAYETTE, CALIF. 94549

MEMBER INFORMATION

last name _____ first name _____ spouse's first name _____

street address _____ phone number _____

city, state, zip code _____ date _____

Annual dues: Please check appropriate line indicating amount of dues payable, attach your check in the amount shown – adding any contribution you can make toward the fire engine repair fund – and mail to **Lafayette Historical Society, P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, California 94549**.

___ Student membership - $ 2.50
___ Family membership - $ 10.00
___ Business membership - $ 50.00
___ Life membership - $100.00

DUES $_____
Contribution to help maintain fire engine _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED: $_____

Please indicate your areas of special interest

___ Archives
___ Landmarks
___ Fire engine
___ Telephone committee
___ Annual potluck dinner committee
___ Research
___ Other: _____

___ Oral history
___ Photograph collection
___ Newspaper clippings
___ Walking tours
___ Displays

Two New Names Added to Board of Directors

Two new names have been added to the Society's Board of Directors: **Frances Hunt and Sheila Piriano.** Members attending the annual meeting elected Frances Hunt to a first term on the Board and incumbents Ruth Dyer, Oliver Hamlin, and Ray Peters to renewed three-year terms. Sheila Piriano was elected to fill the seat vacated by Jack Bailey. She will complete the third and last year of that term.

Jack Bailey retires from the Board and the Membership Committee chair with our thanks. For five years he was always there when needed, a willing volunteer and a dependable workers maintaining our mailing and membership lists and generating mailing labels. He will be missed.

Sheila Piriano and husband, Manny, have lived in Lafayette ten years. She lived in Southern California before settling in San Francisco. When Sheila's Pacific Bell office was moved to San Ramon, the family moved to their Mountain View Drive home in Lafayette. Since retiring, she has been a generous volunteer of time and energy in Lafayette and the Chamber of Commerce.

Frances Hunt, an Oakland native and a member of one of Lafayette's old families, has lived in Lafayette since 1952. She owned and conducted a tax practice in Concord for nearly thirty years, but is now retired and doing some volunteer work.

Congratulations to Frances, Sheila, Ruth, Ollie, and Ray as they take up their 1993-94 portfolios.

FORD

Old Betsy Fire Engine Account GROWING (Like Wildfire!)

Bill Wakeman, the Society and Old Betsy are pleased about the many recent contributions to the fire engine repair fund.

In July, President Bill Wakeman was nominated as LHS's representative in the Honorary Mayor campaign sponsored by the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. Votes for the honorary mayor-in the form of financial contributions earmarked for the fire engine fund- were tallied at the Concours d'Elegance where we were happy to find that Bill's supporters had generated $552. That wasn't enough to elect Bill, but it put a smile on his face anyway.

Adding that money to the small gifts received over the past two years from people who sent in a little something extra for Old Betsy when they paid their dues, we're getting closer to the day when we can afford the work needed by our dear old Model T.

Thanks to all voters and Contributors!

LAFAYETTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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DEC 1
1993
94615

First Class Mail

Shirley Thomson
1062 Via Baja
Lafayette Ca 94549

Should your address label have a "star" on it, then it's time for dues to be paid!
Thank You!